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DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG, AF/SE WILLIAMSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/28/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PREF PHUM UN SU

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ISMAIL REFLECTS ON BILATERAL  
DISCUSSIONS IN LIGHT OF ICC

REF: KHARTOUM 1130

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In a July 29 meeting with CDA Fernandez, a sarcastic Sudanese Presidential Advisor and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Mustafa Othman Ismail expressed his frustration with the failed U.S.-Sudanese bilateral discussions, claiming that S/E Williamson was ordered to end the negotiations by A/S Frazer. Ismail appeared to link these discussions with the ICC, saying that the GoS previously tried to be cooperative with the U.S., and now questioned what rewards the GoS could expect for its good behavior. Ismail also discussed the CDA's attempts to visit Minni Minnawi, the July 26 attack on a SLM/MM police outpost, and other developments including President Bashir's recent visit to Darfur. END SUMMARY.

BREAK DOWN IN BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS

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¶12. (C) After a warm reception, the CDA reviewed USUN PermRep Khalilzad's comments of July 28 which Ismail had not fully heard about. CDA told Ismail that the GoS should be on its best behavior following Ocampo's request for a warrant for President Bashir. He stated that if the GoS wants to influence the international community, it will need to be cooperative, "not because we can promise you anything, but because it is your only chance of finding a receptive audience." He made it clear that such good behavior should be its own reward with no guarantee whatsoever that "the international community will suddenly be nice to you if you change your policies in Darfur."

¶13. (C) Ismail then immediately turned the discussion to the May 2008 visit of Presidential Envoy Richard Williamson, saying "we tried to cooperate with you during our bilateral discussions, but what reward did we get from that?" Ismail said that they had initially believed that S/E Williamson was independent, close to President Bush, and strong, and that they were quite hopeful that he would be able to move Sudanese-American relations forward. Ismail added that the GoS was so cooperative and flexible during negotiations, that "Williamson must have been thinking to himself that he was the one who was rigid." Ismail stated that by the final day of the negotiations, all difficult issues had been solved, "but then (Assistant Secretary Jendayi) Frazer called Williamson and said it was all off." The CDA responded that as he was not present at the negotiations, he was not aware of this, but he had seen zero evidence that this was the case with either Williamson or Frazer. Sudan would be advised to stick to what you know for sure, that the lack of resolution on Abyei was a major reason for the decision. Ismail then said "We thought that Williamson was strong and could deliver, but we were wrong - now we will have to see what he will bring when he comes for his next visit." Ismail said that prior to the bilateral discussions, it was difficult to

convince government hardliners such as Nafie Ali Nafie about working with the Americans. He then became enthusiastic about the possibility of a breakthrough. As the discussions failed, said Ismail, the hardliners have gained more influence within the regime. Ismail then again stated, "We are convinced that Williamson was forced to end the negotiations."

¶4. (C) Ismail added that the breakdown in the discussions have had a major impact on their foreign policy. He said that the government drafted a strategy for working with the U.S. with immediate, intermediate, and long-term goals. As an example, he stated that one aspect of this strategy included normalization of relations with Israel, because "if things were going well with the U.S., you might be able to help us with Israel, as they are your closest ally in the region." Ismail stated that the breakdown in bilateral talks ended this possibility. More importantly, Sudan had agreed to all the UNAMID implementation issues the USG had raised but that had not been enough.

#### VISITING MINNI

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¶5. (C) CDA Fernandez handed Ismail a copy of the third dipnote submitted to the MFA requesting permission to travel to North Darfur to meet with Senior Presidential Assistant Minni Minnawi. The CDA stated that Minnawi has specifically requested a face-to-face meeting with U.S. officials before he will return to Khartoum, an idea Ismail himself had initially encouraged. CDA told Ismail that Minnawi fears for his safety, and that this visit could benefit the Government of National Unity. Ismail then became defensive, stating that Minnawi's fears of being assassinated are overblown

saying, "If we wanted to take him out we could do that anywhere in Sudan but that is not our way." He said that if the CDA was permitted to travel to Darfur to meet Minnawi, that other ambassadors and UN officials would also have the right to travel there and "Minni would have a base there". Turning to bureaucratic minutiae, Ismail then stated that the dipnote does not specifically mention that the purpose of the CDA's visit "is to convince Minnawi to return to Khartoum." The CDA responded that Minnawi still remains a part of the GNU and that diplomats should still have the right to meet him wherever he is located. The CDA stated, "it is clear that you do not want us from the West to meet Minnawi in the field."

#### ATTACK ON SLM/MM OUTPOST AND DISCUSSION OF JANJAWEED

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¶6. (C) The CDA then expressed his concern of a reported government attack on an SLM/MM police outpost in Abu Hamra on July 26 resulting in four dead (reftel). This was the day after the President was in Darfur. Ismail stated he was not aware of the attack, and the CDA gave details of the central reserve force unit (and former janjaweed force) allegedly responsible for the attack. Ismail offered that some militia and janjaweed groups are not controlled by the government. CDA Fernandez quickly responded that, government officials should control their forces and the militias they have employed in the past. Continuing, the CDA said that it is well known that officials in the Ministries of Defense, Interior, and Intelligence all control different militia/janjaweed units. Deflecting a discussion of the government's relationship with the janjaweed, Ismail sarcastically questioned, "We must sit down sometime and you can teach me about the janjaweed." He also mockingly questioned, "So, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs doesn't have its own janjaweed?"

#### OTHER DARFUR ISSUES

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¶7. (C) The CDA re-emphasized that the GoS can still be cooperative following Ocampo's request for a warrant against President Bashir and it would be very much in Sudan's interests to do so. He stated that when the GoS does move forward on issues of concern to the international community, that the GOS should publicize progress it has made and steps

it has taken. The CDA stated that, for example, although President Bashir apparently agreed to the presence of UNAMID contractor PAE in meetings with UNAMID officials in El Fasher, the GoS has not publicly announced this, nor communicated it privately to the US. The CDA also stated that when the GoS engages in dialogue with rebel movements, that this is positive, as long as it is not another transparent effort at dividing the rebels, and should be shared with the international community. Ismail stated that contrary to some reports, the GoS has had absolutely no contact with Abdul Wahid Al-Nur, but that there have been infrequent conversations with JEM, as "Khalil Ibrahim will occasionally reach out to us."

COMMENT

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18. (C) Although the meeting opened on a friendly note, it quickly turned to difficult issues for the Sudanese including the possibility of an ICC indictment, Minnawi's absence from Khartoum, the GoS's relationship with Arab militia/janjaweed, and Sudanese recriminations about the breakdown in bilateral discussions. The usually glib Ismail attempted to defuse his embarrassment and culpability in these issues through using humor and, in typical GoS fashion, blaming the U.S. for his government's own mistakes. Although he did not focus as much as we expected on the ICC, Ismail focused heavily on the question of what happened at the end of the last round of US-Sudan bilateral discussions, returning to the issue repeatedly. He appeared both convinced that S/E Williamson was ordered to end bilateral negotiations and uncertain about what role the Special Envoy would play in his next visit to Sudan. It was an interesting, if unsettling, performance by Sudan's smoothest and most able diplomat. The questions of what is the bottomline US position on the ICC indictment of President Al-Bashir, and what is the status of any possible bilateral negotiations continue to come up with Sudanese officials, and will be along the first that GNU officials pose to SE Williamson when he returns to Sudan.

FERNANDEZ